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THROUGH
GERMAN EYES

BY

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THROUGH GERMAN EYES

AFTER nearly five months of war, and at the season of the great festival of peace and goodwill towards men, it should be possible to survey the European situation in the spirit of the great Roman historian, 'sine ira et studio.' The present writer has friends and relatives in Germany and Austria, and he would fain say nothing here which he could not say to them, face to face. But this attitude does not involve the abatement of one jot or tittle of the truth. On the contrary, truth is the great reconciler of differences—the common ground on which we and our enemies have to take our stand. It is too soon to attempt a final verdict on the great questions which will come up for adjudication before the bar of history. But it is even now possible to cultivate the spirit of common sense, and to associate with it that nobler 'sensus communis'—the bond of mankind—of which a Roman satirist speaks as rarely found where it is most wanted.

It is possible, indeed, that all reasoning in time of war is mere self-illusion. And the present writer recognizes that in attempting to demolish certain phantoms of the mind, which seem to him to stand in the way of the light—'idols of the tribe, the cave, the market-place, and the theatre'—he may be found to be harbouring idols of his own. If so, they too will come within the general scope of this paper, as 'idols of war'.

THE CAUSES OF THE WAR.

To the attentive student of the Blue Book, the Yellow Book, and the Orange Book, one conclusion seems to emerge beyond the possibility of reasonable doubt, and it is not weakened by anything that is advanced in the German White Book or by any of the known facts of the situation. None of the Entente Powers desired war at the present time. If Great Britain had desired war, Sir Edward Grey would not have laboured day and night to secure a peaceful settlement of the Serbian dispute. If Russia had desired war, she would not have advised Serbia to accept all but the most humiliating of the Austrian demands. That France was responsible for the outbreak of war not even her enemies have asserted. Patent facts point in the same direction. Not one of the Entente Powers was prepared for an offensive war.

On the other hand there is much evidence to show that peace was one of the great assets of Germany, as of Great Britain, and that the German nation as a whole and even the German Government was animated by a fundamental desire for peace. We seem, then, to be presented with the spectacle of two great groups of Powers desiring peace but actually at war. How is that possible ?

The answer is that behind this desire for peace on both sides there lay certain claims (call them ambitions, if you like) which neither side was willing to relinquish and neither to allow as justified in the other.

On our side Great Britain claimed the continuance of her predominance at sea, as necessary to her safety as an island Power and to the existence of an empire which is bound together by the ocean. France claimed some revision of the Treaty of Frankfurt,

whereby an improved status should be secured for the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine—either some measure of self-government within the German Empire or reunion with France.¹ This claim of justice for Alsace-Lorraine must be carefully distinguished from the cry for *revanche*, which no doubt made itself heard in the years that immediately followed 1871.² Russia claimed the position of protector of the Balkan States, and all that it involved.

On the other side, Germany claimed the right to expansion and to a more favourable 'place in the sun', and all that it implied.

It was these rival claims which were never reconciled, and so led to war. Whether they were irreconcilable without an appeal to force we shall now never know for certain. But it is clear that they could not have been reconciled without concessions on both sides. The Germans say that they had been labouring for years for an understanding with Great Britain. But to us Britons it seems that Germany, while desiring peace, was not willing to pay the price of peace. She would not listen to any proposal for the reconsideration of the Treaty of Frankfurt; she steadfastly refused to admit any right of Russia to intervene in the Serbian dispute; she would not recognize the need of Great Britain for a superior fleet. That we on our side have done all that we could to meet the views of Germany I do not assert. But we at any rate gave her a free hand in the matter of the Bagdad railway. Moreover Germany seems to us to have

¹ See a lecture by M. Jacques Preiss, delivered in Paris on Feb. 17, 1913, and quoted in *The German Enigma* by M. Georges Bourdon (Appendix, English translation, pp. 353-7).

² M. Bourdon denies that the desire for revenge has been an active force in France during recent years.

exaggerated the urgency of her need of expansion. The population of Germany is considerably less per square mile than that of Great Britain, and not half that of Belgium.¹ German emigration has fallen to a very low point, because the German artisan can now find employment and good wages at home. Moreover, Germany already has considerable colonial possessions, sufficient for her immediate needs.

'ENGLAND IS THE CHIEF CULPRIT.'

So says Professor Wundt of Leipzig,² and so say most Germans. Indeed this belief, that this country is responsible for having set on foot a plot to ring Germany round with enemies, is the explanation of the special bitterness now felt in Germany against us. Professor Wundt speaks of 'the English programme for the encircling (*Einkreisung*) of Germany': 'For England there is no excuse. It was England that drew up the devilish plan for the destruction of Germany. It was England that set going the monstrous triple alliance (*Dreiverband*) of two lands of ancient European culture with barbaric Russia.' 'As the Lord liveth,' cried Mr. Lloyd George in the City Temple (Nov. 10), 'we had entered into no conspiracy against Germany.' The Germans will not believe that. But it is possible to appeal to obvious facts of chronology. The Dual Alliance of France and Russia came into being in the early

¹ The figures given in *Whitaker's Almanack* for 1914 are:—

German Empire . . .	311	per square mile.
Great Britain . . .	374	" " "
Belgium	658	" " "

These figures are, no doubt, not exact for various reasons; but they roughly represent the facts

² *Internationale Monatsschrift*, Oct. 15, 1914, pp. 122, 126. 'England ist und bleibt der Hauptschuldige.'

nineties (say 1890-4): the *entente* with France was not formed till 1904, and that with Russia not till 1907. In what sense was Great Britain responsible for the actions of France and Russia in 1890-4? Does Professor Wundt mean to say that the alliance of France and Russia was harmless until it was converted into a Triple Entente? If he meant that, he should have said so and given some proof.

The real fact is that Germany by her own acts has ringed herself around with enemies. By the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine contrary to the wishes of the inhabitants she established an enemy on her west as early as 1871; France has never ceased to demand some redress of what she regards as a legitimate grievance. By abandoning the policy of Bismarck and the Emperor William I, in or about the year 1890, she drove Russia, contrary to the predilections of the Czar, Alexander III, into the arms of republican France. And finally by her ship-building policy, obviously directed against Great Britain, and the frank menaces of many of her public men during and since the Boer War, she drove this country into the arms of France and Russia. That is how the *Einkreisung* came about. That Germany in these circumstances should feel bitter and resentful is only natural, especially during the last three years; for the Moroccan incident of 1911 ended in a profound disappointment to the German nation at large; and the outcome of the Balkan War of 1912 was a blow to German and Austrian ambitions in the east. Moreover the Italian alliance, on which Prince von Bülow set such high hopes,¹ has since then proved a broken reed. But to hold Great Britain responsible for all these things is plainly contrary to history.

¹ *Imperial Germany*, English translation, pp. 52, 54.

Professor Adolf Deissmann, indeed, goes so far as to say that France and Russia were merely puppets (*Puppen*) in the hands of Great Britain, on whom the peace of the world hung.¹ If he means that the whole course of European history would have been different, had Great Britain joined the Triple Alliance instead of forming an *entente* with France in 1904, he is no doubt right. But if he is to be interpreted in the sense of the Second German White Paper, as suggesting that this country might have induced or compelled France not to adhere to the terms of her alliance with Russia in July 1914, he is attributing to Great Britain more power than she possessed. The action of France was determined by the ultimatum sent by Germany on July 31. Our action depended on that of France, not vice versa. Had Germany confined herself to a strictly defensive attitude towards France, there would have been no violation of Belgian neutrality, and everything would have been different.

THE NEUTRALITY OF BELGIUM.

Professor Deissmann also affirms his conviction that the violation of the neutrality of Belgium by Germany was only a 'pretext' (*Vorwand*) on our part.² 'England does not fight for the *ius gentium*.' The rights of smaller nations appeal to the conscience of this country more strongly than Professor Deissmann thinks. But it would be untrue to assert that our obligation to

¹ *Internationale Monatsschrift*, Oct. 15, 1914, p. 118.

² General von Bernhardt, however, admits that Great Britain probably acted wisely from her own point of view in joining the group hostile to Germany (*Our Future—a Word of Warning to the German Nation*, English translation by Mr. Ellis Barker, entitled *Britain as Germany's Vassal*, p. 143).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Belgium was the sole cause which brought Great Britain into the field. This we are bound to recognize explicitly. It was not the interest of this country to allow the mouth of the Scheldt to fall under the control of any of the great Powers. To prevent that was, no doubt, part of Lord Palmerston's policy in 1831, when Great Britain stood sponsor to the new-born Belgium. Mr. Gladstone was prepared to fight, if necessary, for Belgian neutrality in 1870. And Sir Edward Grey's action in 1914 was part and parcel of the same policy. But it is quite unfair to suggest that the treaty obligation which we had incurred was of no account in our eyes. Honour and self-interest are happily not always inconsistent with one another.¹ Moreover we had to consider not only our treaty obligation to Belgium, but also our obligation of honour to France.

During the last few weeks a new charge has been brought against this country. It is said that certain documents discovered by the Germans in Brussels prove the existence in 1906 of an understanding between Great Britain and Belgium as to concerted military operations in case of a violation of Belgian neutrality by Germany. And it is argued that this agreement amounted to a violation of the neutrality of Belgium on the part of this country and of Belgium herself. Whether this interpretation can be put upon it is a question of international law, and I am content, at present, to quote the opinion of an Austrian authority, Professor Alexander Löffler, a member of the Faculty of Law in Vienna. A politician, he says, would be justified in assuming that a one-sided agreement of this kind implies that Great Britain would not have taken similar steps in case of a breach of Belgian neutrality by France. But as a scientific lawyer he feels

¹ Cf. *Why we are at War*, p. 122.

bound to give the verdict '*Non liquet*'; the conclusive proof is lacking'.¹ See also Sir E. Grey's statement.²

WHAT NEUTRALITY MEANS.

'The basic condition of neutrality is that a neutral state gives no aid to either combatant.'³ If Belgium had allowed Germany to use Belgian territory as a means of attacking France, she would have lent her aid to Germany and struck a blow at France. Everything depends on the purpose for which a right of way is used. It was Belgium's duty to France as well as her right not to treat France as though she were an enemy. 'A neutral state is entitled to oppose the violation of its territory by all means in its power.'⁴ 'The fact of a neutral power resisting, even by force, attempts to violate its neutrality cannot be regarded as a hostile act.'⁵ That Germany was committing a wrong in her action against Belgium was avowed with cynical frankness by the German Chancellor; and the importance of this admission is not weakened by subsequent attempts to argue that if the Chancellor had known about the agreement referred to above (p. 9), the admission need never have been made.

THE SPECIAL TREATY OF 1870.

It has been argued that as the special treaty signed at Berlin on August 8 and at Paris on August 11, 1870, was binding only during the continuance of the war of 1870 and for twelve months after the ratification of any treaty of peace concluded between the parties, there was no

¹ *Neue Freie Presse*, Nov. 14, 1914. ² *The Times*, Dec. 7, p. 7.

³ *Kriegsgebrauch* (1902), translated by Ellis Barker in *Britain as Germany's Vassal*, p. 250.

⁴ *Kriegsgebrauch*, *ibid.*, p. 252.

⁵ Hague Conference (1907), Article 10.

treaty obligation subsisting in 1914 to protect Belgian neutrality. But this argument ignores the fact that the treaty of 1870 also provided that on the expiration of that term 'the independence and neutrality of Belgium will, as far as the high contracting parties are respectively concerned, continue to rest as heretofore on the 1st article of the Quintuple Treaty of the 19th of April, 1839'.

THE SERAJEVO MURDERS.

It has always been assumed that the crime of Serajevo was the starting-point of the European conflagration of 1914. But in the light of recent revelations it seems that it was little more than a pretext on the part of Austria. On December 5, in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, the ex-Premier, Signor Giolitti, produced a telegram dated August 9, 1913, in which he was informed by the then Foreign Minister that Austria was contemplating aggression against Serbia at that time, and that she had informed Italy and Germany of the fact, at the same time representing her action as defensive, in order to secure the support of those countries under the terms of the Triple Alliance.¹ Italy refused on the ground that the contemplated action was aggressive, not defensive, and that therefore no *casus foederis* could arise. The right of Italy to an attitude of neutrality in any such war was completely vindicated; and she has maintained that attitude on the same grounds during the war of 1914. Apparently Germany also discountenanced the Austrian scheme of 1913; at any rate it fell to the ground. But the fact that there was such a scheme throws an entirely new light on the Serajevo assassinations. We knew before

¹ *The Times*, Dec. 7 and 11, 1914.

that Austria had demanded 'Sentence first, trial afterwards', like the Queen in Alice's Adventures. But we did not know that Austria had proposed to punish Serbia before the crime of Serajevo had been committed. We now see the projected action of 1913 as a continuation of the policy adopted towards Bosnia in 1908.

THE DOCTRINE OF DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION.

For half a century Germany has claimed the right of taking the initiative against a prospective enemy. It was claimed in 1870. It is claimed now. Yet it strikes Englishmen as something novel and perilous. Can a nation ever be sure that a prospective enemy will prove an actual enemy? War may always be averted.¹ This is not the usual German view, however. Herr Maximilian Harden stated the doctrine of aggression as a means of defence in his conversation with M. Bourdon in 1912:² 'Suppose that I have a neighbour who never stops plotting schemes of vengeance against me . . . my elementary right of defence and precaution is to say in my turn, "If you want to fight, it shall be when I choose".' Similarly Germany defends her violation of Belgian neutrality by alleging that she was merely forestalling the prospective violation of the same territory by France. And the *Kölnische Zeitung* declared recently that Germany 'waited as long as honour allowed, but was not so stupid as to wait until everything was ready on the other side'.³ If Great Britain had adopted this principle, who doubts that we might have secured some military advantage in the present war? But our diplomacy was patient, preferring to exhaust every hope of peace before an appeal to force was made.

¹ Prince von Bülow says the same, *Imperial Germany*, p. 92.

² *The German Enigma*, p. 179 f. ³ Quoted in *The Times*, Dec. 8, p. 6.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT.

In the light of the doctrine just discussed the outbreak of war last August becomes quite intelligible. Germany and Austria were of opinion that the psychological moment for defensive aggression had come, and acted accordingly. They do not hold themselves responsible, because their aggression was defensive according to their ideas of defence. That this was the real situation has been gradually revealed by a chain of evidence. First we had the British White Paper, then Sir Maurice de Bunsen's proof that it was Germany that banged the door on peace at the eleventh hour; then came the French Yellow Book, which showed, among other things, the preparations of Germany in co-operation with Austria; and finally comes Signor Giolitti's revelation as to the projected aggression of 1913.

All this is not inconsistent with a fundamental desire for peace on the part of Germany (p. 4). Germany desired peace, but she saw herself surrounded by prospective enemies, and she did not hesitate to forestall their attack.

*Haec, unde vitam sumeret inscia,
Pacem duello miscuit.*

WARUM SIND WIR SO VERHASST ?

This question has been asked by many Germans. I true that Germany has at the present time no sincere friend in the world, except Austria and perhaps Turkey. 'The friend of none! A sad saying, but very significant,' says Professor Georg Steinhausen of Kassel. He finds the cause partly in the exterior qualities of Germans, partly in the traditions of the past.¹ But is it a fact that there was

¹ *Deutsche Rundschau*, Dec. 1909 and Jan. 1910.

any active hatred of Germany in other lands prior to this war? Germany was admired, courted, envied for some of her achievements. But I have never observed that there was any malice in the British envy. We were always told that we must wake up and emulate German enterprise and German industry in manufactures and trade, or we should be outstripped in the race. But we did not even put up a tariff against German goods. We knew that Germany was our best customer. As for any thought of drawing the sword to destroy a commercial rival, no one who knows this country believes that it was ever entertained. Yet to Germans without number this figment of the imagination is an article of faith. It is unnecessary to quote names; the charge is writ large in the manifesto addressed to the Evangelical Christians abroad (signed by thirty eminent men, including Professors Eucken, Harnack, and Wundt), and the declaration by professors and men of science entitled 'European War'.

The Triple Alliance, we are told, was a strictly defensive league, the Triple Entente essentially aggressive.¹ What is the evidence for this assertion? How does it look now in the light of accomplished facts? King Edward VII is known in this country as 'Edward the Peacemaker'; to the Germans his whole policy seems to be an act of aggression against them.

THE MIDDLE-AGED BURGLAR THEORY.

Professor von Treitschke held a different view of the position of Great Britain. On the whole it seems less out of touch with reality; for it represents this country as contented with what she has got, and pacifically minded. To von Treitschke Great Britain seemed like a middle-aged burglar who desired to retire from business, and

¹ Prof. Adolf Wagner of Berlin (*The German Enigma*, p. 79).

therefore proposed that burglary should cease. Germany, on the other hand, was a young and enterprising burglar, just starting on a promising career. So long as Great Britain, the great robber state, retained her booty—one-fifth of the habitable globe—what right had she to expect peace from the nations? ¹ Her empire was decadent, moribund; and Germany had not only the power but also the right and the duty to wrest her empire from her. ² For right is a question of might. At the bottom of this theory one must recognize a sense of outraged justice. ³ And if one is asked to justify Great Britain's having painted red one-fifth of the habitable globe, frankly one cannot. Nor can one justify the fact that *A* earns five times as much as *B*, but not one-tenth of the income of *C*. In this workaday world we have to be content with a rough kind of justice, and to acknowledge accomplished facts. We must 'live and let live'.

It should be borne in mind, however, that though we commonly speak of 'our colonies', they are not strictly *ours*. The relation is not one of ownership in the sense in which that term is understood in Germany. Our fellow countrymen have settled in distant parts of the earth, and the land which they occupy is *theirs*. We trade with them; we support them in various ways and are supported by them. But we do not take tribute from them. The whole relation is something of a mystery, which the Germans have hitherto completely failed to grasp. It is highly complex, highly unorganized. Perhaps

¹ See the late Professor Cramb's *Germany and England*, p. 14, and cf. General von Bernhardt in *Our Future*, &c., p. 207. The theory is also well stated by Professor Usher in *Pan-germanism*, pp. 247, 248.

² Cf. von Bernhardt, quoted in *Germany and England*, p. 65.

³ For the same point of view at the present day see the French Yellow Book, p. 2: 'France with her forty million souls has not the right to rival Germany in this way.' Cf. pp. 3, 4, 19.

it will not remain so much longer. But if a change is to be made, it will assuredly not be in the direction of ownership. Nor will it be in the direction of separation, if the hopes awakened during this war are realized. I am speaking, of course, of the great self-governing colonies, such as Canada.

Von Treitschke was, of course, writing of a period long prior to that of the Triple Entente. His theory is, therefore, not necessarily inconsistent with the theory of British aggression referred to above (p. 6 f.). Yet it must be noted that, according to von Treitschke, Great Britain has been Germany's 'one and only enemy' for three or four decades at least, without knowing it. Her mere existence was an aggression; the British Empire was inconsistent with Germany's right to expansion. The middle-aged and sated burglar might, then, at least plead that his subsequent development into an aggressive foe was not without provocation, and that it was indeed a measure of self-defence.

GERMAN 'WISSENSCHAFT'.

No one admires more sincerely than I do the achievements of German science in the fields of which I have cognizance; yet I sometimes wonder whether the Germans are not tempted to trust too implicitly in their power of knowing, especially their power of forecasting the future in the domain of international relations. For, as Lord Beaconsfield said, it is the unexpected that happens. There is, after all, something to be said for the rooted distrust of the Britisher for what he calls 'theory'. The whole justification of the German policy of defensive aggression is based on the assumption that it is possible to know the intentions and future actions of other nations. The flimsiness of this kind of knowledge is illustrated by many passages in General von Bernhardi's books. For

instance, 'England is interested in destroying Germany's competition ;'¹ from this he infers that England does actually intend to destroy it. Again, 'All these circumstances make it obviously desirable for Great Britain that a war should break out as soon as possible ;' hence he 'cannot help concluding that England would like to bring about a war between Russia and Austria by means of the Balkan trouble, in the hope that such a war might lead to a general European war'.² Sir Edward Grey was not of that opinion ; but General von Bernhardt knew where the true interests of England lay. It must in fairness be added that the next page contains an important admission : 'Of course one cannot prove whether and how far these surmises correspond with the facts. It will probably never be possible to unravel the Anglo-Russian policy of intrigue.'

THE ETHICS OF BIOLOGY.

There are several other idols which I might attack ; for example, the doctrines that the rights of nations depend on their merits as civilizing agents ; that a nation is morally bound to co-operate with those who are akin to it by blood ;³ that the policy of maintaining a balance of power is an essentially immoral policy.⁴ And we too have had our false prophets, who, like some persons in Germany,⁵ did not believe in the possibility of war. But

¹ *Our Future*, &c., p. 144.

² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

³ The old Roman name for Winchester (*Venta Belgarum*) reminds us of our kinship with the Belgians, whose Germanic origin is attested by Caesar in his *Gallic War*, ii. 4. But who would justify our action on that ground ?

⁴ This is constantly asserted as against Great Britain ; but Prince von Bülow justifies Bismarck in following the same policy (*Imperial Germany*, English translation, p. 55).

⁵ e. g. Count Hatzfeld, Count Reventlow, and Prince Lichnowsky : see *The German Enigma*, pp. 100 f., 161, 92, 94.

there is one idol which I must not pass by—the doctrine that there is no such thing as morality in the relations of states: ‘*Might is Right.*’ It is curious that those who profess this doctrine go on to attempt a justification of their policy on ethical grounds, so soon as war breaks out. This is surely insincere; let us have either one thing or the other. If international action is guided solely by force and fraud, let it not be defended on other grounds. But perhaps those who proclaim this doctrine are not quite serious in their application of the law of the ‘*survival of the fittest*’ to international relations. There is, of course, an unfortunate ambiguity in the term ‘*fit*’. But Darwin lent no countenance to the interpretation of his law as an ethical precept. Huxley, indeed, explicitly repudiated that interpretation. ‘*Social progress means a checking of the cosmic process at every step and the substitution for it of another, which may be called the ethical process; the end of which is not the survival of those who may happen to be the fittest in respect of the whole of the conditions which exist, but of those who are ethically the best.*’¹ But German writers of the present day, especially historians of the Berlin school, refuse to admit that the ethical process in the individual has any application to states. They fail to see that just as in the state the force of the civil arm compels obedience to the law, so in the family of nations a combination of the well-disposed may be able to enforce a respect for international law upon a nation which refuses to obey it. It is, of course, obvious that it is more difficult to bring this result about in the latter case than in the former. And we have not yet attained that ideal of a goodwill in nations which is a condition of the

¹ *Evolution and Ethics* (The Romanes Lecture for 1893), p. 33.

realization of their co-operation. Nevertheless the hope of the future lies in the recognition of the great truth that the relations which subsist between the individual citizen and his state ought to be reproduced in the family of nations. Each nation must learn to regard itself as a member of a great community and be prepared to strike, if necessary, in defence of the common good. In proportion as this feeling grows, we shall learn to cast behind us the immoral doctrine that the only duty of a nation is to play for its own hand, and to substitute for it the good old precept, 'Righteousness exalteth a nation.' Even now we see this hope taking shape.

A brotherhood in arms ! For right, for law !
Presage of what shall be in days to come
When nations leagued in common counsel stand,
Strong in good will, to impose the rule of peace
And strike, if need be, for the general weal !

Nor need we lose heart when we reflect that the ideal of a 'concert of Europe' is not a new thing in history. It still looms before us as an aspiration, nowhere more alive, we are told, than in the land of its origin.¹ And a recent step of the first importance towards the realization of this dream, though it has hitherto attracted little public attention, is the agreement made between Great Britain and America that in any future dispute between these two countries a whole year shall elapse before any declaration of war.

¹ Prince Kropotkin, letter to *The Times*, Oct. 9, 1914, p. 5 ; cf. also Professor Vinogradoff's letter, *ibid.*, Sept. 14, p. 10 (reprinted as one of the Oxford Pamphlets).

WHY WE ARE AT WAR

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